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William C. Nelson to Maria C. Nelson (11 November 1862)

William Cowper Nelson

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Recommended Citation

Nelson, William Cowper, "William C. Nelson to Maria C. Nelson (11 November 1862)" (1862).
Correspondence. 680.
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Camp of the 17th Mississippi Regiment,
near Culpeper Court House, Va, Nov. 11, 1862

My Dear Mother;

I wrote to you last week from this place and enclosed a letter to Sister; since then nothing of importance has occurred in our Division of the Army; since our arrival at this point we have been resting on our oars, waiting for something to turn up. Yesterday we heard cannonading nearly all day, and this morning we learned that a portion of our troops met and repulsed the enemy, driving them some four miles, when we were met by a larger force, and compelled to retire. Our Division was under marching orders all day, but I suppose our services were not needed, as we did not leave camp. The fighting took place about eight or ten miles from here. Featherston's Brigade was engaged.

A few days since we received our knapsacks, which we left at this place, when we passed through here on our excursion into Maryland also our tent flies, which we had not seen since we left Halover Junction, August 26th. we have been without them so long, that we have learned to do very well without them, we build bivouacks of oil-cloths &c. with the open end towards a huge log fire, and wrapping ourselves in our blankets sleep very comfortably. Last Friday we had a slight snow here, and the weather was quite cold, but the last two days have been exceedingly pleasant, warm and sunshiny.

I paid a visit to the city the other day, Fairfax, or Culpeper as it is usually called up here, is quite a pretty little village of some 12, or 1500 inhabitants, it has no public square as Holly Springs but the business houses are all on one street; in fact there are not more than half a dozen stores there, that have anything in them now, and they sell at exorbitant prices, hats, 15 dollars, gloves 12, paper 2.00 per quire, and other things in proportion; there are some very pretty residences in the village, most of the new ones on the Cottage style of architecture, I have seen a great

Capt. & Sears has not yet returned to the Regt. he and Capt. Buff were the two Senior Captains, both their commissions bearing the same date. when Major Upshur resigned the question of seniority between the two Captains had to be decided by lot, and Capt. Buff was the successful individual. and is thought to be the place of Major Upshur.

many fine residences in different portions of Virginia and Maryland, both in town and country, but none have I seen outside of the city of Richmond, that I would prefer to ours, I still cherish hopes of seeing my beloved home and parents again, although the time may be far distant. I believe, however that I grow more and more contented every day, with the hardships of a soldier's life. I never let a day pass without reading one or more chapters in my Bible, and I know that its perusal does me good. I commenced on my 21st birthday to read it through, and have advanced as far ^{as} Deuteronomy in the Old Testament, and Luke in the New, I generally read three chapters in the Old, and one in the New each day; and at that rate expect to finish in one year.

A great many of the soldiers of our army are in sad need of clothing, shoes, hats, etc, quite a number are almost barefooted, but we expect in a few days to be furnished with shoes and such other articles as we absolutely need. I have procured myself a good pair of pants, and also two pairs of socks, I expect to be able to get my clothing from Richmond before winter sets in, and I think my old overcoat will do me this winter, so, if you have not already made arrangements towards having me one made at home, you need not put yourself to the trouble; you would probably be unable to send it, anyhow.

I never was in better health in my life than I am at present, I weigh 154 pounds, and I think, if the Commissary continues to furnish as good beef as he has done hitherto, that I will fatten to 175 this winter.

I had the pleasure of seeing, a few days since, Dr Todd, Mrs. Lincoln's brother, he is Chief Surgeon of McLaw's Division, there is nothing remarkable in his appearance, he is rather small in stature, and sparely made, looks hard and firm, and I expect could amputate a limb, with as much nonchalance as any one. Love to all friends, Your Affectionate Son
Wm. B. Nelson